

FEATURES

Marine, NASCAR fan finds fun in newfound hobby

CPL. JENNIFER BROFER
STAFF WRITER

Twenty eight-year-old Staff Sgt. Jason Thornton, staff NCOIC of the pay deck at the Depot Finance Office, has turned his love of NASCAR racing into a hobby that has him aspiring to be on the fast track to racing success like his idols Rusty Wallace and Bobby Hamilton Jr., but in a slightly different way — go-cart racing.

Thornton, who is from Gnadenhutten, Ohio, has been racing his five horsepower go-cart competitively on weekends since April, slowly learning the tricks of the trade with each adrenaline-pumping, dirt-flying race — a sport he first discovered while surfing the Internet.

“I’ve always loved NASCAR, and I love racing, so it’s something closer to that and cheaper,” said Thornton, who races his #25 Marine Corps race cart on a track in Guyton, Ga. “I found it online and found that there was a track in Georgia. I watched them race, and I wanted to get into racing, but I didn’t want to spend a bunch of money on a race car.”

Thornton ignited his weekend hobby by purchasing a used go-cart on the Internet for \$900.

So far, Thornton has participated in 13 track-level races, but has found that racing is not all glory and trophies. There are many aspects that go into operating the methanol-fueled machine.

“The hardest thing is learning how to set up the cart,” he said. “Just different changes to make to the cart so it turns better or to get more speed out of it. You can also change gear ratio or tire pressure.”

Thornton, who has been a Marine for 10 years, said being in the Corps has helped give him an edge over other racers.

“During the week, I get my cart ready by washing it and making sure the engine runs smoothly,” said the



“It’s never too late to try anything. Hopefully I can learn a lot about the sport and possibly get my kids into it at a younger age. ”

-Staff Sgt. Jason Thornton, staff NCOIC of the pay deck at the Depot Finance Office

husband and father of two. “I think my attention to detail might prevent my cart from breaking down like some of the other racers.”

However, with so many intricacies to monitor, a lot of things can still go wrong during a race.

“There could be dirt in the fuel, or the motor could shut off, or your chain could break ... I had that happen to me once,” he remembered. “One time my spark plug stopped working, too. All you can do is pull off the track and lose.”

Although his attention to detail may give him an advantage off the track, he said being a Marine may also prove to be a disadvantage to his racing sometimes.

“Since I’m a little more aggressive, I might put myself into situations I shouldn’t get myself into and get into a wreck,” he said.

Though his racing started off with meager beginnings, he took home his first consolation trophy earlier this

year, giving him and his wife hope for more racing wins in the future.

“He’s going to do really good next year,” said Thornton’s wife of seven years, Sabrina. “It seems like we’ve had bad luck, but he just got a new motor and a new body, so hopefully we’ll work out all the kinks.”

In support of his new-found pastime, Sabrina even created a Web site that tracks his progress, which can be found at www.geocities.com/jarhead-jason.

“I’m excited that he’s found something he wants to do,” said Sabrina. “The kids think it’s great. They love watching their dad race.”

Thornton even hopes to get his children interested in competing in the sport when they are old enough.

“That was one of the reasons I got into it — I’d like to see my son interested in it,” he said of his son, Joshua. “He’s 5 now and kids can start racing at age 8, so hopefully he’ll want to start doing it.”

When asked why he chose to start racing at age 28, he said, “It’s never too late to try anything. Hopefully I can learn a lot about the sport and possibly get my kids into it at a younger age. Maybe four years from now both of them will be beating their ol’ man out on the track.”

Thornton continues to improve his racing skills by gaining valuable knowledge about the sport on and off the track — knowledge that he will carry into the next season of points races.

Points races are series of races where points are awarded for each race, then calculated at the end of the season when trophies, cash and prizes are awarded to the racers with the most points.

Though there are multiple levels of racing, Thornton said he is content with sticking to the track level for now.

“There are so many levels —there’s the track level, state level and international level,” he said. “Each state



Photo courtesy of Sabrina Thornton
Thornton whizzes past fellow cart racers at the Pineora Kartway in Guyton, Ga., Saturday. Thornton hopes to get his 5-year-old son Joshua and 9-year-old daughter Tabitha interested in go-cart racing one day.



Photo courtesy of Sabrina Thornton
Thornton’s #25 Marine Corps race cart comes equipped with a five-horsepower Briggs and Stratton motor, which races at speeds of up to 7,000 RPM. He bought the cart used on the Internet for \$900 to help jumpstart his weekend racing hobby. Thornton has participated in 13 track-level races since he began racing in April. He started as #5 and changed to #25 halfway through the season.

has different races. I thought about competing in the South Carolina races, but I don’t think I’m up to that point yet.”

Halfway to a 20-year retirement from the Marine Corps, Thornton

said he is proud to be a Marine, but will always make time for the track, where he can race his cart adorned with Marine Corps decals.

“I’ll race as long as there is a track nearby,” he said.

I didn’t know fire hydrants could talk . . .



Cpl. Alisha R. Fitzgerald
Nyjan Yates (left) and Dakota Guest, 2-year-olds in the Depot Child Development Center’s Little Lambs class, watch as ‘Pluggie,’ the Parris Island Fire Department’s moving and talking fire hydrant, entertains them between scenes of the Sesame Street puppet show performed by PIFD firemen at the Depot Youth Center Oct. 9. The show was done in conjunction with National Fire Prevention Week, which was Oct. 5 - Saturday.